

THE OCCUPATION OF THE AMERICAN MIND Israel's Public Relations War in the U.S.

[Transcript]

Introduction

Text on screen: "It doesn't matter if justice is on your side. You have to depict your position as just." – Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel

Narrator: On July 8, 2014, Israel launched a devastating military attack on the Gaza Strip. Over the course of 51 days, the Israeli military dropped nearly 20,000 tons of explosives on Gaza, a densely populated area the size of Philadelphia, killing over 2,000 Palestinians and wounding tens of thousands more. The overwhelming majority of these casualties were civilians.

Television news montage: This strip of land is being bombarded from the air, sea, and land... Israel launched at least 160 strikes on the Gaza strip... And there's one less hospital in Gaza now. Israel today flattened Wafa Hospital.

Narrator: The sheer scale of the attacks sparked outrage and condemnation around the world.

News anchor: Israel's month-long pounding of Gaza shocked many people around the world. Mass demonstrations have been held in many of the world's major cities.

Narrator: But in the United States, the story was different. Polls showed the American people holding firm in their support for Israel.

Anderson Cooper, CNN anchor: This is the latest CNN-ORC poll of Americans – shows 57% of those polled say Israel's action in Gaza is justified, 34% say unjustified.

Narrator: These numbers were striking, but they weren't new. Over the course of a conflict in which Palestinian casualties have far outnumbered Israeli casualties, the American people have consistently shown far more sympathy for Israelis than for Palestinians.

Peter Hart, Communications Director, National Coalition Against Censorship: It's very difficult to divorce public opinion on any question from the media coverage that people rely on to form opinions. And I think the most prevalent lesson from looking at the coverage is that the coverage tends to see this conflict from the Israeli side.

Sut Jhally, Professor of Communication, University of Massachusetts-Amherst: Study after study has demonstrated that Israeli perspectives dominate American media coverage. So by far the most common thing we've heard is that everything comes down to Israel's right to defend itself.

Tzipi Livni, Israeli Foreign Minister (2006-2009): Israel is a state that implements its right to defend itself and its citizens.

Yousef Munayyer, Executive Director, U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation: It is a talking point that is set from the top, and by the top I mean from the highest officials, government officials, who are commenting on this issue, which the media obsessively covers and repeats.

Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel: A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do, and you say a country's gotta do what a country's gotta do. We have to defend ourselves.

Yousef Munayyer: In the most recent war in 2014, when we looked at mainstream media outlets, almost by a margin of 3 to 1, Israeli spokespeople were overrepresented compared to Palestinian spokespeople. So almost every time you turned on the screen there was an Israeli representative on the screen telling you Israel is the one that's in a position of defense. It is being attacked.

Ron Prozor, Israeli UN Ambassador (2011-15): And basically, Israel is saying: hey, you don't have to be a rocket scientist to understand that if rockets fly on your head, you're allowed to defend yourself.

Yousef Munayyer: Add to this the fact that you have American elected officials also reinforcing Israel's right to defend itself.

President Barack Obama: As I've said many times, Israel has a right to defend itself against rocket and tunnel attacks from Hamas.

Yousef Munayyer: And you hear some of the same framing by anchors who reiterate and reinforce many of the same talking points that the Israeli official spokespeople are making.

Jake Tapper, CNN anchor: Israel has the right to defend itself against Hamas, of course – a group that is firing rockets on Israel, coming out of tunnels to attack Israelis.

Yousef Munayyer: That imbalance there was very significant in shaping the way the public understood this conflict.

Rula Jebreal, journalist, former MSNBC commentator: I worked in the European media for a long time. The coverage is the opposite. There's Palestinian legislators, Palestinian thinkers, Palestinian intellectuals, and pro-Palestinian thinkers. Many voices.

Hanan Ashwari (appearing on BBC): So let me say then very frankly, it's very easy to blame the victim. It's very easy to pull out the terrorist label.

Rula Jebreal: You come to America and you think that you are an alien, you're looking at a different world, or a different planet, and I'm thinking, "What's going on here?"

Mark Crispin Miller, Professor of Media Studies, New York University: When a narrative is so dominant...

Michael Oren, Israeli Ambassador to the U.S. (2009-13): Thousands of rockets...

Mark Crispin Miller: ...without any visible dissent or complication, it's extremely difficult to make clear to people that it is – it is basically a propaganda story.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry: Israel is under siege by a terrorist organization.

Mark Crispin Miller: How do you make that clear when the mainstream spectacle is so unrelenting and total?

Sut Jhally: We hear over and over again that the conflict comes down to Palestinian terrorism and Israeli security, and what gets pushed out of the frame entirely is the fact now that for almost 50 years, Palestinians have been systematically dispossessed from their land and denied their most basic human rights.

The Catastrophe

Archival newsreel: Pioneers and refugees from countries of the oppression, young and old, they are going now to a land, which accepts them. They will march to their work in the Jewish settlements: To build roads. To quarry stones. They will drill wells to restore to Palestine's soil its long-neglected fruitfulness.

Narrator: Zionism, the nationalist movement that emerged in Europe in the late 1800s, was dedicated to the idea that the Jewish people, after centuries of living as persecuted minorities within other countries, were entitled to a state in historic Palestine, the Biblical homeland of the Jews more than 3,000 years before.

But there was a basic problem with the choice from the start. Palestine was already home to hundreds of thousands of Palestinian Arabs, who had been living in Palestine for centuries – first under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, and since World War I under the control of the British Empire – and for decades had aspirations of their own for an independent state in Palestine.

Tensions steadily escalated during the 1930s, placing more and more pressure on the British colonial government to reconcile the competing interests of both sides. After World War II and the Holocaust, the situation reached a breakpoint. Ultimately the British colonial government made the decision to withdraw and to pass the problem on to the newly created United Nations.

In 1947, UN Resolution 181 recommended that Palestine be split into two parts. Jews, who were a third of the population, would receive 56% of the land. Palestinians, who were two-thirds of the population and possessed more than 90% of historic Palestine, would receive

44%. These terms were immediately rejected by Arab leaders as unfair. But in the spring of 1948, Zionist leaders declared Israel a state along the proposed borders anyway, triggering the first Arab-Israeli war.

Archival newsreel: Arab armies set out to destroy the newly born nation, and suffered repeated defeats.

Narrator: After winning a crushing victory, Israel took possession of even more land. By the time armistice was declared in 1949, Israel controlled 78% of historic Palestine. The creation of the new state would be celebrated by Israelis as a triumph. But to this day, it is commemorated by Palestinians as “The Nakba” – the Arabic term for “The Catastrophe” – in memory of the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who were driven from their homes to make way for the new Jewish state. All told, approximately 700,000 people, more than half of Palestine’s native population, were uprooted.

Yousef Munayyer: There's a lot of sympathy that can be generated, and I think rightly so, for what Jewish people as a whole have dealt with in Western societies, and globally, because of anti-Semitism. The question then becomes: what is the proper response to that? The Zionist answer is, of course, statehood, and there's many people who would sympathize with that if it was in fact done in a vacuum, and if it was, in fact, done for a people without a land in a land without people. The reality is that's just not the way that it happened. There were people here. They lost their homes, their livelihood, their nation, their everything.

Rami Khouri, columnist, Beirut Daily Star: This was a land, in 1910, that was 93% Palestinian Arab and six, seven percent Jewish. How did it suddenly become 80% Jewish and 20% Palestinian? This was not a normal demographic transition. This was a consequence of Israel's desire to create a Jewish state, and to do that it had to get rid of as many Palestinians as possible. There's other more complex factors, but that's cutting it to its bare bones as we see it.

Rashid Khalidi, Professor of Modern Arab Studies, Columbia University: That is, I think in a certain sense, the core of the conflict. The Palestinians have suffered inordinately as a result of the creation of Israel. The creation of a Jewish state, in a country that had an Arab majority, necessarily and inevitably caused them irreparable harm.

Phyllis Bennis, Institute for Policy Studies: The Palestinians use the term catastrophe to speak of the 1948 consequences, when they lost their land the first time around. In '67, it was another Nakba, another catastrophe.

Narrator: In June of 1967, Israel won what was perceived as a stunning underdog victory over much larger Arab armies during the Six Day War. With victory, in addition to taking land from Egypt and Syria, Israel began to militarily occupy all remaining Palestinian territory in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem.

Phyllis Bennis: Suddenly all of Palestine is now lost. We now had no Palestinian land left under Palestinian control. You had a huge Palestinian population living as refugees or living under occupation. Palestinians are governed under military law. They are essentially prisoners. They are treated as if they were all prisoners of war. They have no rights.

Narrator: In the immediate aftermath of the '67 war, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 242. Citing international law forbidding the takeover of territory by war, 242 explicitly called for Israel to withdraw its armed forces. But to this day, Israel has largely failed to comply – not only holding Palestinian territory, but confiscating additional land and building massive Jewish settlement blocks in the West Bank and East Jerusalem in direct violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which expressly forbids states from transferring civilian populations into territory it occupies.

In addition, Israel has established an entire matrix of security control on Palestinian land to secure these settlements, including checkpoints that prevent Palestinians from traveling freely within their own land, and a 440-mile security wall along the Israeli border that cuts into Palestinian territory.

Yousef Munayyer: We're talking about massive denial of human rights, for millions of people. At the most basic level, the government that is ruling over these people is not a government in which these people, the Palestinians, have a voice.

Sut Jhally: There's really no way to fully understand why the Palestinian people have resisted Israel for so long without understanding this basic history of dispossession and occupation. But for the most part, this isn't the story we get in American media coverage. Instead, the legitimate grievances of Palestinians, including their right to resist an illegal military occupation, get pushed out of the frame by this constant discussion about extremism and terrorism and anti-Semitism.

Bill O'Reilly, Fox News Channel anchor: You know, rational, clear-minded people understand that Hamas is a terror group and it is committed to killing Jews and wiping Israel off the face of the earth. That's not debatable. That's a fact.

Phyllis Bennis: It's never about land somehow, that gets dropped out. It's never about settlements. It's always about "they hate us because we're Jewish."

Rashid Khalidi: Whatever the Palestinians have done is portrayed in terms of mindless violence against Jews out of some kind of primeval anti-Semitism. No sense of how this started, where this animus comes from. It's completely inexplicable in the way in which it's generally presented and these people basically kill because they hate and they hate because they're irrational Muslim fanatics or whatever.

Benjamin Netanyahu: And I think Americans largely get it. They know who the good guys are and who the bad guys are.

Rashid Khalidi: This is not an illusion. American public opinion is generally supportive of Israel because it's been led to believe that Israel is in the right and the Arabs are bad guys.

Sut Jhally: And none of this is by accident. It's the result of a deliberate effort to shape American perceptions of the conflict – a propaganda effort that really begins to take shape with Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

“Propaganda is not a dirty word”

Television news montage: Israel unleashed another massive air attack on Palestinian guerilla targets in Lebanon today... From the sky, the howl of Israeli jets, bombing and bombing... Tonight, Israel has never been closer to, nor more in control of, an Arab capital.

Narrator: In the summer of 1982, Israel invaded neighboring Lebanon in an attempt to drive the Palestinian Liberation Organization out of its encampments on the southern border with Israel. Israeli officials justified the attack as a defensive action required to take out terrorists. But as the story played out on American television, a different narrative began to emerge, one that presented Israel as the aggressor.

John Chancellor, NBC Nightly News anchor: What in the world is going on? Israel's security problem, on its border, is 50 miles to the south. What's an Israeli army doing here in Beirut? The answer is that we are now dealing with an imperial Israel, which is solving its problems in someone else's country, world opinion be damned.

Norman Solomon, media critic, founder of The Institute for Public Accuracy: The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 was a watershed. It was Israel breaking out beyond its immediate region to aggressively attack another country and it was a bit of a shock to many people.

Richard Threlkeld, ABC News reporter: Israel was always that gallant little underdog democracy fighting for survival against all the odds. Now the Israelis have annexed East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, settled down more or less permanently on the West Bank, and occupied close to half of Lebanon. In the interests of self-defense, that gallant little underdog, Israel, has suddenly started behaving like the neighborhood bully.

Narrator: By the time the war was over, the Israeli military would kill 17,000 Lebanese and Palestinians, and wound another 30,000, almost all of them civilians.

News reporter: In West Beirut, hospitals are so packed with the injured that they have become specialized. This center takes only burn victims of phosphorous shells. Shrapnel cases, concussions, and fractures are directed to other facilities.

Narrator: And just a few months later, American media coverage would take an even darker turn.

Bob Schieffer, CBS Evening News anchor: There's been another horrendous turn of events in the Middle East. Hundreds of men, women, and children, perhaps as many as a thousand people in all, have been massacred in two Palestinian refugee camps in West Beirut.

Narrator: Israel's Lebanese allies, operating with the consent of the Israeli government, had massacred several thousand Palestinian civilians in the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila. And American news media had the pictures to prove it.

News reporter: The Israelis permitted an armored column of right-wing Christian gunmen to enter West Beirut late Friday. They took up positions surrounding Shatila refugee camp last night, and this morning they were gone.

News reporter: A bloody massacre which has heightened tensions between the US and Israel.

Phyllis Bennis: Sabra-Shatila was hardly the first massacre committed by Israel against Palestinians and against Arabs. There's a dirty legacy of Israeli massacres from the pre-state through the creation of the state and beyond. The big difference was this one was televised.

CBS reporter: By all appearances, groups of men had been ordered to stand against the wall and then gunned down in cold blood.

NBC reporter: Today, Palestinians searched frantically for relatives. They took our children, one said. They're killing our families.

Phyllis Bennis: This was a game-changer in terms of how Israel was going to deal with the question of publicity. They went on the offensive for the first time.

Dan Meridor, Israeli government spokesperson: All the direct or implicit accusations that the IDF bear any blame whatsoever for this human tragedy in the Shatila camp are entirely baseless and without any foundation. The government of Israel rejects them with the contempt which they deserve.

Phyllis Bennis: It was perhaps the first time they recognized at the highest levels inside Israel how much they needed to do that if they expected to maintain the kind of understood support in the United States – Israel can do no wrong, Israel is always the victim, Israel is the little David against the big bad Goliath.

Narrator: Two years after the Lebanon invasion, the American Jewish Congress sponsored a conference in Jerusalem to devise a formal public relations strategy – known in Hebrew as “Hasbara.” Participants included PR and advertising executives, media specialists, journalists, and leaders of major Jewish groups. According to a brochure from the Congress, “No single event brought home the need for a more effective hasbara, or information program, more persuasively than the 1982 war in Lebanon and the events that followed.”

As one conference participant put it, “Israel is no longer perceived to be ‘little David’, but Goliath steamrolling across the map.”

The primary aim of the conference was to develop strategies to spin unpopular Israeli policies and to counter negative press coverage by shaping the media frame in advance. “News doesn’t just jump into a camera,” a conference delegate said. “It’s directed, it’s managed, it’s made accessible.” Israel-based advertising executive Martin Fenton would put it in even more blunt terms: “Propaganda is not a dirty word,” he said. “Face it. We are in the game of changing people’s minds, of making them think differently. To accomplish that we need propaganda.”

The conference was chaired by U.S. advertising executive Carl Spielvogel, the legendary adman who created the highly acclaimed Miller Lite Beer ads in the 1970s.

Sut Jhally: The choice of Spielvogel makes perfect sense. He’s known as a master of image inversion and re-branding ... the ad man responsible for transforming Miller Lite, which had been viewed before as a women’s beer, into a manly beer that tough guys would drink.

Miller Lite Beer television advertisement:

- The best part is that it tastes so great.
- The best part is it’s less filling.
- Nah, tastes great!
- Less filling!

Sut Jhally: His job with Israel would require the same kind of re-branding, only in the opposite direction – to help soften the image of a country that’s coming to be seen as a bully. So he recommends creating a cabinet post dedicated exclusively to explaining policy, whose job would not be setting policy, but presenting it in the most attractive way to the rest of the world.

Norman Solomon: Classic PR is to say, the problem is not the policy; it’s the presentation. When the policies are so reprehensible that many people become critical, rather than acknowledge there’s anything wrong with the policy, there’s a doubling down on the PR effort.

Sut Jhally: After Lebanon, you start to see the basic hasbara strategy in action. Images of Palestinians fighting back against Israel’s occupation make their way onto American television screens – and the Israeli military crushes this resistance in brutal ways that undercut Israel’s image as underdog and victim.

NBC news reporter: Israeli helicopter gunships deliberately fired a missile into a crowd of civilians last night, killing seven Palestinians and wounding 70 more.

Sut Jhally: Then Israeli officials go into full hasbara mode and act like the occupation doesn’t even exist, framing all Palestinian resistance as terrorism and Israeli aggression as self-defense.

Israeli government spokesperson: We will do whatever it takes to defend ourselves, and defend ourselves we will.

Sut Jhally: That's the basic hasbara strategy in a nutshell. Even when you're violently crushing resistance to your own brutal occupation, portray Israel as an innocent victim by demonizing Palestinians as nothing but terrorists.

Israeli government spokesperson: The Palestinian terror campaign continues. It only justifies again and again that we, Israel, have to continue to defend ourselves.

Phyllis Bennis: There have been horrific Palestinian terrorist attacks, and I use that word very specifically to mean what terrorism means, which is attacks on civilians for a political purpose.

News reporter: Anger in Israel today over last night's suicide bomb in Tel Aviv, which killed four and wounded around fifty.

Phyllis Bennis: Those are horrific attacks, which should be condemned. They are violations of international law, period. But the problem is that Israeli violence is assumed to be legitimate because it's always self-defense.

News reporter: Some of the people who have been killed are said to be civilians. In fact, two of them are said to be little girls. But the Israeli military says they try to the best of their knowledge to make sure whoever they are striking was a known militant.

Amira Hass, reporter, Haaretz newspaper in Israel: All the cases when Palestinian people were killed by the Israeli military, and this is not called acts of terror. And one should ask why if it is civilians who are being killed, but from a plane and not by a suicide bomber, why this is not terror and only terror is when somebody's killed by a suicide bomber.

Norman Solomon: If the terrorist label can only be affixed to one set of people but not another set of people, then you're in an Orwellian zone, you're down a rabbit hole of linguistic manipulation.

Benjamin Netanyahu: The last thing they want is a political settlement. What they want is more demonstrations, more riots, more bodies – that's what they want.

Yousef Munayyer: And so this becomes the framing of the situation: Israel is defending itself, which means Israel is not the aggressor here. That doesn't square with the reality on the ground, and we know that. You have a right to defend yourself. You don't have a right to occupy people, deny them their human rights, and then cry foul when they resist. That's not the right to self-defense. That's the right to repression. That's what Israel is asking for here: Let us do away with these dissenters, these Palestinian dissenters, and call it defense.

Narrator: As news media have proliferated over the years, Israel's public relations efforts have only become more and more explicit and intense.

Theme song from NBC reality show, The Apprentice: Money, money, money, money ... money!

Max Blumenthal, journalist, author: In the United States, we have a show called The Apprentice, where Donald Trump auditions people to work in his corporate boardroom. In Israel, the version of The Apprentice is called The Ambassador.

Announcer (television promotion for The Ambassador): The Ambassador! In a world where the real battles take place in newsrooms and TV studios, the ability to create a positive image for your country is a crucial task for every ambassador.

Max Blumenthal: It's a show where Israelis compete for who can offer the best hasbara – that means explain in Hebrew, explain our situation.

CNN reporter: While The Apprentice tests contestants' ability to sell lemonade on the street or handle office politics, The Ambassador finalists have learned that selling real politics is a lot harder.

Contestant, The Ambassador: The problem is that when you sell lemonade, nobody hates lemonade. Nobody is going to say that your lemonade occupies territories or that your lemonade kills babies.

Max Blumenthal: Israel's mechanism of projecting its propaganda, or what they call hasbara, is one of the most sophisticated arms of its government. It's a weapon of Israeli warfare.

Sut Jhally: And when you look today at how the media cover the conflict, you see just how successful Israel's propaganda has been in reversing the legacy of Lebanon.

Benjamin Netanyahu: If there's any complaints, and there should be, about civilian deaths, the responsibility, the blame, belongs in one place: Hamas. I don't think anyone should get that wrong.

Peter Hart: The Israeli position is the first position. They are allowed to determine the narrative, determine the facts on the ground.

Ron Dermer, Israeli Ambassador to the U.S.: Hamas is a terror organization committed to our destruction. They fire thousands of rockets at our cities.

Peter Hart: It becomes a story of Israelis responding to Palestinian attacks.

News reporter: Israel says this is a response to the almost 800 rockets that had landed in Israel from Gaza this year alone.

Sut Jhally: Again and again, the wider context of Israel's occupation simply drops out of the coverage, so that it comes across as this confusing and endless cycle of violence that begins when Palestinians attack and Israelis retaliate in self-defense.

News anchor: Three Palestinians were shot and killed while allegedly trying to attack Israelis with kitchen knives.

Brian Williams, NBC anchor: This cycle of violence continues. When Hamas launches rockets from Gaza, Israel hits back.

Yousef Munayyer: Cycle of violence pre-supposes this back and forth retaliation. It's the same sort of thing with "a lull in the violence" or "a relative calm."

Jake Tapper, CNN anchor: After three days of relative calm, the violence is once again picking up here in the Middle East.

Yousef Munayyer: Well, relative to who and to what? Right? What's actually going on – on the ground – is not ever a lull in the violence for Palestinians. In fact, occupation is a system of violence that goes on every single day. Just because there's no violence that Israelis are witnessing for a particular period of time before it resumes again, does not mean that there's no violence facing Palestinians from the occupation. So this lull in the violence is only seen through the prism of Israeli victimhood, not Palestinian victimhood.

Peter Hart: It's no wonder that Americans would identify with the Israeli side or support it. It would be shocking if they didn't. And I think this is the lesson to be drawn from thirty years of media coverage that I think has been slanted heavily in favor of Israeli interests.

Sut Jhally: What we've seen is really another kind of occupation – an occupation of American media and what we could call "the American mind" by a pro-Israel narrative that's deflected attention away from what virtually everyone recognizes as the best way to resolve this conflict: end the occupation and the settlements so that Palestinians can finally have a state of their own.

"Terror, not territory"

White House public address announcer: Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Council of the Palestine Liberation Organization, his excellency Yitzak Rabin, Prime Minister of Israel, and the President of the United States.

Narrator: The ongoing peace process that began with the Oslo Peace Accords in 1993 was designed to negotiate the terms of Israel's withdrawal from Palestinian territory in accordance with UN Resolution 242, which made an explicit connection between Israeli withdrawal and a just and lasting peace.

Noam Chomsky, Professor Emeritus, M.I.T.: For decades, there has been an overwhelming international consensus on a political settlement of the conflict, namely a settlement on the internationally recognized border.

Sut Jhally: The international consensus for a two-state solution is based on the borders in place before the '67 War. This means that Israel gets 78% and the Palestinians get the rest – 22% of historic Palestine. 22%. That's it.

Narrator: But since Oslo, Israel has actually taken more Palestinian land for its Jewish-only settlements. In 1993, there were approximately 200,000 illegal Jewish settlers living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Since then, that number has more than tripled, with approximately 650,000 settlers now living in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. In addition, since 1967, Israel has also demolished approximately 28,000 Palestinian homes.

BBC news anchor: The United Nations says there's been a big increase in the number of Palestinian homes demolished by Israeli forces.

BBC news reporter: This is what Palestinians have called ethnic cleansing. Demolitions and evictions carried out by Israel in the occupied West Bank.

Palestinian girl (translated, English subtitles): What did we do to them to destroy our life?

Norman Finkelstein, political scientist: So if you look at the result, not the words and the pretty phrases, what's happened over the past 20 years, and was inaugurated at Oslo, was not a peace process. It was an annexation process.

Rashid Khalidi: What has happened is that now one in eleven Israeli Jews live in these illegal settlements. So the failure to confront the settlement enterprise from the very beginning, I think, has created a almost insuperable obstacle to a creation of a Palestinian state. There's no place to put it.

Phyllis Bennis: And that's what the settlements are all about – it's to claim the land, facts on the ground, that become “nothing we can do about it now; it's too late.” Israel wants as much of the land as they can get away with, with as few Palestinians on it as possible.

Henry Siegman, Professor, University of London: Israeli governments from the very beginning, after the '67 war, never considered giving up Israeli control of the territories. Moshe Dayan, who served as defense minister and foreign minister, people asked him: what will be the future now that we're controlling the territories?

Text on screen: “What exists today must remain as a permanent arrangement in the West Bank.” – Moshe Dayan, Minister of Defense, 1968

Henry Siegman: And he said the future will be exactly what it is today. We must continue to retain control of these territories.

Sut Jhally: Just listen to Netanyahu talking in private to his right wing settler base in 2001 about how he has no intention, despite what Israel agreed to at Oslo, of giving up land and ending its illegal settlement expansion in the West Bank and the rest of the Jordan Valley.

Benjamin Netanyahu, talking to settlers (secret recording, translated, subtitles): They asked me before the election if I'd honor the Oslo accords. I said I would, but I'm going to interpret the accords in such a way that will allow me to put an end to this galloping forward to the '67 borders. How did we do it? Nobody said what defined military zones were. Defined military zones are security zones. As far as I'm concerned, the entire Jordan Valley is a defined military zone.

Sut Jhally: Netanyahu's clear that Israel's not giving anything up – but he's also very clear that the way to make that argument is to invoke security threats. And he's especially confident that he can manipulate the American people to buy into this security argument.

Woman (recording continues): But then the world will say how come you're conquering again?

Benjamin Netanyahu: I know what America is. America is a thing you can move very easily, move it in the right direction.

Sut Jhally: And this of course is exactly the case he's made to the American people, time and time again, whenever Israel's been called out for refusing to end the occupation and its settlement project.

Netanyahu (in speech at Jewish Federations): We're willing to make great concessions for peace, but there is something that I will never compromise on. And that's Israel's security.

Norman Solomon: The conventional wisdom is that continuing the occupation makes Israel more secure. And if you buy that argument, then it's a license to occupy indefinitely.

Yousef Munayyer: What we're talking about here is something that is completely indefensible. Israel knows this – Israel knows this very well – and for that reason wants to talk about anything and everything else. They'd rather talk about terrorism. They'd rather talk about security. They'd rather talk about Iran – anything but the occupation.

Sut Jhally: The reason they've been able to so effectively change the subject isn't because they're practicing some kind of mass mind control. The main reason is that the US government itself has had a vested interest in promoting this same narrative for almost 50 years now.

This goes back to the start of the so-called special relationship with Israel in the late 1960s, when the US decides to deputize Israel and make it what the Nixon administration called a

“cop on the beat” to protect American interests in the Middle East, especially US energy supplies.

Ever since, the American government has continued to give Israel roughly \$3 billion a year in military aid while also vetoing one UN resolution after another condemning the occupation and settlements. The challenge is to make sure that the American people stay on board with US aid despite what Israel is doing.

Narrator: A number of well-funded public relations organizations have emerged within the United States to help Israel justify its policies, especially the occupation and settlements, on security grounds. One of these groups is the Israel Project. In 2009, the Israel Project turned to conservative pollster and re-branding expert Frank Luntz.

Stephen Colbert, The Colbert Report, Comedy Central: Frank Luntz! This is the man that reframed the estate tax as the death tax, health care reform as government takeover of health care. Now some critics have called Luntz a spin-doctor who manipulates public emotion. But Luntz would reframe that as Fox News analyst.

Narrator: The Israel Project hired him to determine which talking points used by Israeli and US officials over time have been most effective in maintaining American sympathy for Israel. Luntz wrote up his recommendations in a 2009 report called The Global Language Dictionary.

Sut Jhally: If you want to understand how the propaganda works, especially in the U.S., you need to read the Luntz document. He’s really clear that the occupation – and especially the settlements – are a problem. And he points to polls that show a large majority of Americans actually think that Israel should retreat to the ’67 borders. In fact, he says, when you talk about land in terms of ’67, you completely flip American sentiment against you. But, and this is his solution, if you bring up the danger of terrorism, you win back the support. The key, Luntz says, is to claim that the fight is over ideology, not land – about terror, not territory. In fact, these three words – terror, not territory – summarize the basis of the propaganda campaign in the U.S.

And Luntz goes onto say that one of the most effective ways to make the conflict about terrorism is to refer to an obscure political document written in 1988 by a small group of ideologues, the Hamas Charter, that calls for the destruction of Israel. Even though the Hamas leadership effectively disowned the Charter a long time ago, it’s been PR gold for Israel. Luntz’s research discovered that when Americans hear the words of the Charter, Israel goes from bully to victim, and sympathy for the plight of the Palestinians dissipates. So, he says, Don’t just quote it, read it -- out loud -- again and again. And his advice has been taken up – often hysterically – by Israel’s advocates.

Morton Klein, Zionist Organization of America: The Hamas Charter not only calls for Israel’s destruction, ladies and gentlemen. Article 7 calls for the murder of every Jew! It calls for the murder of every Jew! It’s a Nazi document!

Yousef Munayyer: We have the Israeli prime minister saying movements like Hamas that are national movements are the same thing as ISIS.

Benjamin Netanyahu: Hamas is like Isis, Hamas is like al Qaeda, Hamas is like Hezbollah, Hamas is like Boko Haram.

Yousef Munayyer: And they're completely not the same thing. And anyone who understands anything about the Middle East and political dynamics there will explain to you exactly why that is the case and immediately spot that for the propaganda that it is.

Henry Siegman: Hamas is as much a nationalist movement as it is a religious movement. And, in fact, it often assigns priority to its nationalist goals over its religious goals. This false notion that Hamas is part of this al-Qaeda network is not bought even by important elements of the American military.

Narrator: In 2010, the United States Central Command, or CENTCOM, the highest military command in the U.S., issued a classified report that questioned the current U.S. policy of isolating and marginalizing Hamas, as well as Hezbollah in Lebanon. The report described the two groups as “pragmatic,” and argued that putting them and al Qaeda in the same sentence as if they’re all the same “is just stupid.” And it directly repudiated Israel’s publicly stated view that Hamas and Hezbollah are incapable of change and must be confronted with force, warning that failing to recognize their grievances and objectives would result in continued failure in moderating their behavior.

Sut Jhally: And the U.S. military isn't alone in this assessment. Isis itself has attacked Hamas again and again because they're not radical enough. They're too pragmatic and too compromising. But none of these facts stop people from going on and on about the Hamas charter anyway in order to paint Hamas with the same brush as Isis.

Sean Hannity, Fox News Channel anchor: I’ve spent a lot of time on my radio program going over Hamas’s Charter, what it says. It wants to obliterate Israel. It wants to destroy the Jews. It is a sick, twisted, you know, perverted ideology, a religion that has been hijacked by radicals, and it manifests itself in different forms – Muslim Brotherhood, Islamic Jihad, Hamas, Hezbollah, Isis, al Qaeda, it’s all the same thing.

Sut Jhally: Meanwhile, you hear next to nothing about another extreme political charter that has much more relevance to the conflict – the platform of the ruling Likud party in Israel.

Yousef Munayyer: Well, if you look at the language that's in that charter – the Likud charter – it flatly rejects, quote, flatly rejects the existence of a Palestinian state anywhere, anywhere, on that side of the Jordan River. In other words, completely denying the right of a state of Palestine to exist. That’s far more relevant to have language like the language in the Likud Charter be in the charter of a party that is the largest in an Israeli government, driving an Israeli state, and has the capacity to act upon the words in their charter in a way that no other party does.

Narrator: To strengthen the case that the conflict is about terrorism, and not territory, Luntz points to the effectiveness of another well-established Israeli talking point: the claim that Israel gave up control of Gaza in 2005 in hopes of achieving peace and a two-state solution and got only rockets in return.

Ron Prozor, Israeli UN Ambassador: We left Gaza completely. We had Gaza, they could have turned it into a flourishing, wonderful place to live in. Look at what they did. They turned it into a haven of terrorists coming from all over the world.

Yousef Munayyer: It's completely untrue that Israel left the Gaza strip. They did withdraw their colonists, but at the same time they tightened their control over the Gaza Strip.

Reporter: This is Gaza's main freight route into Israel, and normally this road would be bumper to bumper with heavily laden trucks. But it's completely closed, as is every other border crossing in the country. Nothing's coming into Gaza, and nothing is getting out.

Yousef Munayyer: So the idea that Israel left is 100% bogus.

Phyllis Bennis: Gaza remains occupied. Gaza has no control over its coast, over its waters, over its harbor, over its airspace, over the land or its borders, over its people—who can come and go is totally at the Israeli discretion. In Gaza, there are constant military attacks by the Israeli air force, by drones. Targeted assassinations go on all the time.

Peter Hart: It wasn't really a withdrawal. But the conventional shorthand in the media is that Israel was willing to "give up" an enormous amount to the Palestinian side and the Palestinians responded with violence.

Senator Harry Reid: Israel, since 1967, controlled Gaza. They gave it to the Palestinians in a gesture of peace, and all they got are a bunch of rockets in return.

Sut Jhally: This is the basic frame of Israel's PR campaign – make sure the media stays focused on terrorism and Hamas extremism as the source of the conflict – not the occupation and settlements. If you want to see this in operation just look at the coverage of any of Israel's many attacks on Gaza over the past few years.

"In the war of the pictures we lose"

News montage: Good evening. In the 60 years of conflict between Israeli and the Palestinians, there have been few if any days like this one... The scale and intensity of this attack were surprising – the deadliest operation against Palestinians in decades... After an intense three-week assault, 1,300 dead, 5,000 wounded.

Narrator: In late December of 2008, Israel launched Operation Cast Lead, a massive ground and air assault on the Gaza Strip. Over a period of three weeks, the Israeli military

dropped over 600 tons of bombs on Gaza. Nearly 1,400 Palestinians were killed, and thousands more injured.

NBC Nightly News reporter: The wounded were carried on corrugated iron, in private cars, on backs, and in arms. The worst one-day casualty toll in Gaza anybody can remember.

Rami Khouri: Normally in a conflict, civilians can run for their lives. Gaza was one of the few, if not the only, modern conflict where the helpless civilians who were subjected to massive technologically advanced firepower by the Israelis had no escape routes.

CBS Evening News reporter: With Gaza City bombed and burning, Palestinians heeded Israel's warning to get out of the way, but found they had nowhere to go.

Reporter (translating words of Palestinian woman): What's a safe place for us to go, the woman cried. Not the UN compound, where 700 people took shelter. Israeli artillery hit it, then hit it again.

Noam Chomsky: It was a brutal, murderous attack, devastating. This attack was murderous.

Narrator: As with the Lebanon invasion three decades before, horrific images of destruction spilled onto television screens around the world. But this time the Israeli government was prepared. Six months earlier, it had set up a new unit within the Israeli Prime Minister's Office to help coordinate the government's messaging once the invasion started.

NBC Nightly News reporter: Israel is defending its actions saying this assault is a direct response to almost daily rocket and mortar attacks.

M.J. Rosenberg, former AIPAC staff member: If you ask any American why that war started they would say because the Palestinians started you know firing rockets at Israel.

Trace Gallagher, Fox News Channel anchor: Hamas – keeping up the rocket fire that triggered the Israeli attacks in the first place.

Shepard Smith, Fox News Channel anchor: Hamas once again firing several dozens rockets into Israel today.

M.J. Rosenberg: They're always preparing Americans for an attack against these people who are incorrigible terrorists who are constantly shooting rockets and never ever giving the other side of the story.

Peter Hart: We were told endlessly in any media outlet you want to look at that Israel had to invade and attack the Gaza strip because of an unending assault from Hamas and various militant groups in Gaza.

CBS Evening News reporter (interviewing Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak): What are the goals of that operation right now?

Ehud Barak: To change totally the behavior of the Hamas. It is a terrorist regime that keeps shelling Israel with thousands of rockets and mortar shells.

Peter Hart: What this forgets is that for the latter half of 2008 there was a very successful ceasefire that curtailed rocket fire into Israel dramatically – almost to the point at which there was none. This was shattered in November of 2008 when Israel attacked what they said was a tunnel building project, killed six Hamas militants. At that point the ceasefire was off. And the New York Times, the so-called paper of record, reported this very clearly – one time.

Sut Jhally: The story gets buried on Page 8 of the New York Times and hardly registers anywhere else. Why? Well, look at the day that Israel chose to break the ceasefire, November 4, 2008, which just coincidentally happened to be the day of the historic election of Barack Obama. It virtually guaranteed that no one in America would notice. And that's exactly how it played out. When Hamas resumed rocket attacks after Israel broke the ceasefire, Israeli officials went on American television and got away with blaming Hamas for breaking the ceasefire.

Mark Regev, CNN: You know, it was Hamas that unilaterally tore up the ceasefire understandings. It was Hamas that escalated the violence that reached a crescendo on Christmas day, when we had in one 24-hour period some 80 rockets, mortar shells, and missiles coming into Israel, attacking our civilians. Now we want to work with the Palestinian government ...

Sut Jhally: And the lie was then repeated uncritically by US news media.

Larry King, CNN: James, there's no question here, is there, that Hamas started this?

Fred Barnes, Fox News Channel: Well, I don't think Israel had any choice. There was a ceasefire that was broken by Hamas. They fired something like 300 rockets into Israel. I mean this is an act of war. What were they supposed to do?

Sut Jhally: Just compare this to how media outside the US dealt with this.

Anchor, Channel 4, Britain: Isn't it a fact that during the ceasefire not a single Israeli was killed and the reason for that was because Hamas fired not a single rocket.

Israeli government spokesperson: No, I think you're wrong, unfortunately. Because during that ceasefire of six months, they were firing rockets on daily basis.

Sut Jhally: On Channel 4 in Britain, you saw an anchor presenting evidence that the Israeli government itself acknowledged that Hamas observed the ceasefire.

Anchor, Channel 4: This is actually a document given to journalists by the Israeli government and in this document it says, and I'm quoting: " Hamas was careful to maintain the ceasefire."

Sut Jhally: The Israeli official, clearly caught in a lie, attempts to change the subject to how evil Hamas is. But the interviewer doesn't let him get away with it.

Israeli government spokesperson: They were firing rockets, and they're always trying to target civilians. Their main goal is to try to kill children and women. And...

Anchor, Channel 4: I'm going to have to stop you. Because this document is published by the intelligence and terrorism information center, at the Israel Intelligence Heritage and Commemoration Center, and they say that Hamas...

Israeli government spokesperson: It's not the government, sorry...

Anchor, Channel 4: They say that Hamas maintained the ceasefire.

Israeli government spokesperson: It's not the government; it's a private institution...

Anchor, Channel 4: It's given to foreign journalists by the government as a statement of fact. Now the facts are...

Israeli government spokesperson: Listen! Would you like to hear the facts or would you like to invent some facts?

Anchor, Channel 4: Yes, I would like you to tell me the facts!

Sut Jhally: Exchanges like these are unthinkable in the US, even though Israel, itself, behind the scenes, acknowledged Hamas had observed the ceasefire – something another British reporter forced Israeli spokesperson Mark Regev to admit on camera.

Channel 4, Britain, reporter: There were no Hamas rockets during the ceasefire. Before November the 4th, there were no Hamas rockets for four months.

Mark Regev: And that's correct.

Noam Chomsky: Israel officially recognizes that until it broke the ceasefire, Hamas didn't fire a single rocket. I mean, the propaganda is so powerful that these truisms, literally truisms, are almost inexpressible.

Peter Hart: The lesson is that this conflict started when we say it started. And when we say it started when Israel was attacked.

Narrator: In 2012, and again in 2014, Israel launched two more devastating attacks on Gaza.

Sut Jhally: Israel can saturate the media with its spokespeople, but there's still the problem of massive Palestinian casualties showing up on television screens. You can't make those images go away. An Israeli official actually said, "In the war of the pictures we lose ... so you need to correct, explain, or balance it in other ways." Here again, the Luntz document spells out which talking points have been most effective in spinning the brutal reality of Palestinian casualties. He says the first thing the pro-Israel spokespeople should do, is to express empathy for the innocent victims.

Israeli government spokesperson (on Fox News): Unfortunately, innocents do get hurt. And we, we really grieve that.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (on Fox News): We're sad for every civilian casualty.

Michael Oren, former Israel Ambassador to US (on MSNBC): The entire situation is tragic.

Sut Jhally: Once you've done that, Luntz says, you also have to get people to empathize with Israelis by describing what life is like for them living in constant fear of Hamas rocket attacks. So again and again we hear the focus-tested phrase that the rockets are raining down on Israel.

Michael Oren: We have thousands of rockets raining down on our civilians.

Hillary Clinton: Rockets were raining down on Israel.

Norman Solomon: Any advertising executive will tell you, the essence of propaganda is repetition.

News Montage: Rockets raining down on Southern Israel... Rockets raining down on Israel... Well, Hamas rockets rained down on Israeli border towns.

Sut Jhally: Then Luntz tells PR spokespeople to "turn the tables" and ask the American people: "What would you do?"

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (on ABC News): So what would you do in the United States?

Ron Dermer, Israeli Ambassador to US (on CNN): Could you imagine what America would do if it were facing a similar threat?

Israeli government spokesperson (talking to CNN anchor Wolf Blitzer): We always try to ask you the question we ask ourselves. What will you do?

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (on NBC Nightly News): What would you do?

Mark Regev (on CNN): What would you do if more than 3,000 rockets had been fired on your cities?

Sean Hannity (Fox News Channel): What would you do? 3,000 rockets.

Mark Regev (on CNN): What would you do if terrorists were tunneling under your frontiers?

Sean Hannity (Fox News Channel): What would you do if three kids are kidnapped because of a tunnel network?

Yousef Munayyer: What sort of question is this? Of course, anybody would act to defend themselves against unprovoked aggression. But it is a question that is completely devoid of any context. What drives a society to a point where after multiple devastating wars they continue to resist with these most feeble methods? They don't want you to ask that question. They don't want you to ask what is behind this, what is the history here, who are these people? Where did they come from? Why are they so desperate? No. They want you to understand Israeli behavior. Israeli behavior is always characterized as a reaction to unprovoked violence.

Sut Jhally: Then on top of that, when massive numbers of Palestinian civilians predictably die from Israeli attacks, Israel claims it's part of a deliberate Hamas strategy to drum up sympathy.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu: They use telegenically dead Palestinian for their cause. They want, the more dead the better.

Sut Jhally: So that you end up in this upside-down, Orwellian world where Israelis killing civilians becomes an unforgivable transgression against Israelis.

Bob Schieffer, CBS Evening News anchor: It is hard to come away with any feeling but that we are in the midst of a world gone mad. Last week I found a quote of many years ago by Golda Meir, one of Israel's early leaders, which might have been said yesterday. "We can forgive the Arabs for killing our children," she said, "but we can never forgive them for forcing us to kill their children."

Peter Hart: It's not difficult to imagine Americans identifying with Palestinians who are suffering. But they need to be able to see that suffering on their television screens and in their newspapers.

News reporter: Israel said today its new offensive is targeting terrorists.

Peter Hart: And when your sense of the coverage is that, there's something that these people did to deserve this, or they are affiliated with terrorists and terrorist-minded governments, the fallout of that is an inability to identify with people who are suffering in far greater numbers and in far greater proportion than their Israeli counterparts.

The Lobby

Narrator: The effort to shape American perceptions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been taken up by a number of pro-Israel groups based in the U.S. Together these groups are commonly referred to as the Israel Lobby. Nowhere has the lobby's power to shape a pro-Israel narrative been more visible than in the US Congress, due largely to the efforts of one of the most influential lobbying groups working on Capitol Hill today – the American Israel Public Affairs Committee – better known as AIPAC.

AIPAC Promotional Video:

- **Obama:** It is great to see so many good friends from all across the country.
- **Congressman Eric Cantor (R-Virginia):** I see more than 10,000 people, young and old.

Narrator: AIPAC's annual conference draws nearly 10,000 attendees from around the country, including the most influential members of both houses of Congress from both parties.

AIPAC promotional video (continues):

- **AIPAC tour bus guide:** Remember there are seven Congressional office buildings.
- **Senator Bob Casey (D-Pennsylvania):** As you leave here today to meet with your Senators and Representatives, I want you to go there knowing with certainty that you'll make a difference with every member that you meet.
- **AIPAC representative:** You're going to feel so good when, six months from now, you see the three major talking points evolve to three points of legislation for the US government.

Rashid Khalidi: It would be very hard for ordinary Americans to know that they're being deceived, that some very competent experts at spin management are in fact deluding them. There are many reasons for this. One of them is that the American political class has basically swallowed the line hook, line, and sinker.

Congressman Dan Burton (R-Indiana): They keep getting rocket attack after rocket attack, and then they're criticized for human rights problems because they defend themselves!

Rashid Khalidi: This is particularly true for Republicans...

Congressman Scott Perry (R-Pennsylvania): They're responding, Mr. Speaker, to attacks on their civilian population. I mean, what is it that they want? Well, we know what they want. They want Israel obliterated from the map, Mr. Speaker.

Rashid Khalidi: But it's also true for many Democrats.

Senator Cory Booker (D-New Jersey): We stand with our ally. We stand with the democratic state of Israel. We stand against terrorism.

Hillary Clinton: This administration will always stand up for Israel's right to defend itself.

Rashid Khalidi: They made the mistake of actually leaving AIPAC's fax address on one bill that was actually laid before Congress. And of course, nobody was apparently embarrassed. The fact that AIPAC writes the legislation for them, or writes their speeches for them, doesn't seem in the least to bother people.

Stephen Walt: There's nothing happening here that's secret or under the table, it's not a cabal, it's not conspiracy. It is, in fact, domestic politics the way it's practiced here in the United States. There are roughly three-dozen or so pro-Israeli PACs that give money. Over the last 15 or 20 years, they've given 55 - 60 million dollars in American elections. There are one or two Arab-American PACs, and I believe the last time I looked they've given 800,000 to a million. So you've got 55 million dollars of PAC contributions on one side, and you've got maybe a million at most on the other side. And that gives you a pretty good sense of what the balance of power is, if you're planning on running for Congress.

M.J. Rosenberg: It's all about the money.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (speaking before Joint Session of Congress): And I do see a lot of old friends here. And I see a lot of new friends of Israel here as well, Democrats and Republicans alike.

M.J. Rosenberg: Bibi Netanyahu got a joint session, so that Democrats and Republicans would have the opportunity to stand up and cheer for him and it would be good for their campaigns to raise money. He put out the most hardline propaganda that went entirely against US policy.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu: The border will be different than the one that existed on June 4, 1967. Israel will not return to the indefensible boundaries of 1967.

M.J. Rosenberg: And he gets 29 or 39 standing ovations. What are they applauding? The continuation of the conflict? Are they applauding that more Israelis and Palestinians are going to keep dying? Is that what they're applauding? No, they're applauding, 'We want more money in the next campaign!' That's what it's entirely about. There is no other issue like this.

Sut Jhally: For the most part, the lobby pushes policies that are consistent with US interests anyway. And when these interests don't align, we see the limits of the lobby's power, as we saw with Obama's Iran policy, which passed despite an intense campaign by the lobby to defeat it. So we shouldn't overstate the influence of the lobby on American foreign policy. But at the same time, we shouldn't underestimate the lobby's power to limit debate about Israeli policies in the occupied territories, especially far right Israeli policies that are often way out of step with the political views of most American Jews. In fact, it's not accurate to call it the Jewish lobby at all. It's the Israel lobby.

Rashid Khalidi: The actual views of most people in the American Jewish community, according to every poll, diverge greatly from the extreme right-wing, neoconservative views of the entire establishment leadership of that community. Most people in the Jewish community are much more liberal. They're against settlement; they're against occupation; they want a two-state solution. The lobby and its various other institutions are the main supports and props of settlement and occupation and of protection of the status quo.

Stephen Walt: And there are some key elements of what we call the Israel Lobby that aren't Jewish, the so-called Christian Zionists.

Christian network news anchor: Evangelical Christians in America have become Israel's staunchest ally in an increasingly hostile world.

Sut Jhally: Powerful groups like CUFI, Christians United for Israel, lobby Congress for an expansion of Israeli territory because they believe that's what the Bible calls for.

Christians United For Israel (CUFI) promotional video announcer: CUFI representatives from all fifty states went to Capitol Hill. Their purpose was to personally speak with their elected officials and express concerns for Israel's security and their support of Israel's right to the land by biblical mandate.

Noam Chomsky: In the United States, roughly a third of the population believes that every word of the bible is literally true. If the bible is literally true, then the land of Israel was promised to the Jews by God, and they have every right to take it over from the usurpers.

Pastor John Hagee, founder of CUFI: Listen closely, those of you who are listening in the liberal media. The Jewish people are not occupying the land of Israel. They own the land of Israel. The truth about Israel is God gave the land of Israel to Abraham in an eternal blood covenant 4,000 years ago. The land of Israel belonged to the Jewish people then, it belongs to the Jewish people today, and it will belong to the Jewish people forever. The land is their land.

Stephen Walt: One of the problems with the influence the Israel lobby has in the United States now is it has been hard for government officials to have an honest discussion.

Sut Jhally: Just look what happened to President Obama when he made the mistake of simply saying out loud what the international consensus is.

President Barack Obama: We believe the borders of Israel and Palestine should be based on the 1967 lines, with mutually agreed swaps, so that secure and recognized borders are established for both states.

Sut Jhally: It didn't matter that Obama was just repeating what had been official US policy for decades, or that right-wing president Ronald Reagan had said essentially the same thing in the 1980s, in even stronger language.

President Ronald Reagan: UN Resolution 242 remains wholly valid as the foundation stone of America's Middle East peace effort. It is the United States position, that in return for peace, the withdrawal provision of Resolution 242 applies to all fronts, including the West Bank and Gaza. Further settlement activity is in no way necessary for the security of Israel, and only diminishes the confidence of the Arabs that a final outcome can be freely and fairly negotiated.

Sut Jhally: When Obama said it, he was immediately accused by right-wing groups of setting up Israel for another Holocaust.

Announcer, pro-Israel advocacy group television ad: Has President Obama abandoned Israel? After strong support by 11 consecutive American presidents, it appears Obama has moved sharply towards Israel's enemies. And the results could be disastrous. The leader of Hezbollah has vowed to finish the job Hitler started. Up till now, America's strong backing of Israel made that impossible. But with Obama's waffling, can a second Holocaust be on the way?

Crowd, at pro-Israel rally, chanting: "No Auschwitz borders!"

Sut Jhally: It's a pretty ingenious tactic: how are you supposed to have a rational discussion about the occupation when pro-Israel extremists call the '67 borders the Aushwitz borders?

Crowd: "No Auschwitz borders!"

M.J. Rosenberg: These are the two alternatives: you're either going to be in Auschwitz or you're supporting Israel. Because Israel was in fact created in the wake of the Holocaust, it isn't that extraordinary that the two would be linked that way. I have a problem with the idea of exploiting the link and using those six million Jews almost, in my mind, it's like saying Anne Frank would want the occupation to continue.

Mark Crispin Miller: You know, the Jews have gone through unspeakable historical trauma, right? But, the fact is that if you look at other reactionary or right wing propagandas of various kinds, nationalistic and so on, you see that what they all kind of have in common is this view that we are in danger, we are beset, we victims, they're trying to destroy us.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu: If history has taught the Jewish people anything, it is that we must take calls for our destruction seriously. We're a nation that rose from the ashes of the Holocaust. When we say, never again we mean never again!

Mark Crispin Miller: You're the victim, so anything you do in self-defense is okay, even though it has you acting like a monster, right?

Senator Ted Cruz (R-Texas): A suggestion that Israel has committed war crimes is particularly offensive given that the Jewish people suffered under the most horrific war crimes in the Holocaust.

Norman Finkelstein: It's the argument that they always use, remember the Holocaust. Always invoking the Holocaust in order to justify Israel being held to a different standard than everyone else is being held to.

Amira Hass, correspondent, Haaretz of Israel: I see a lot of manipulation here about the victimhood of Israeli Jews, the sense of victimhood. And I'm a child of survivors, Holocaust survivors, so I'll be the last one to underestimate the importance of history and the history of persecution of Jews in the Israeli-Palestinian context. But does it mean that Jews now in Israel go every day and think about Auschwitz? I doubt it.

Stephen Walt: Anyone who is critical of the special relationship, criticizes the activities of the lobby, or disagrees with the policies they recommend, or is critical of Israel's conduct, is virtually certain to be attacked, usually in very harsh ways by Israel's defenders. There are watchdog groups that keep track of what different media organizations publish or broadcast and if they're not happy about it, they either publish their own attacks, they organize consumer boycotts.

M.J. Rosenberg: Israelis and the lobby do not think there's ever any problem with policy. The problem is only the way it's covered, which is why they have organizations like CAMERA, which is, you know, Committee on Middle East Accuracy. Accuracy means that you present the side that makes Israel look good.

The lobby and the Israelis believe that the mainstream media in America is pro-Palestinian! I mean it's laughable.

Steve Emerson (on Fox News Channel): Consistently the Times has suppressed any story that would portray Israel sympathetically. And on the other hand has written dozens of stories portraying the Palestinians sympathetically.

Cal Thomas (on Fox News Channel): Israel is now portrayed in much of the major media, especially CNN, the BBC, as the aggressor, as the predator nation, and the poor Palestinians and Arabs as the victims.

Peter Hart: It's one of the most profoundly successful tactics of right wing media pressure and media criticism groups. And they are going to argue that it's true in violation of all the facts.

CNN anchor: You're saying that because CNN has interviewed Palestinian families and shown Palestinian children who have been wounded or killed that somehow CNN is saying that Hamas is okay? I don't think that those two are equivalent. We're not allowed to show the civilians caught in the crossfire?

Ben Shapiro, Editor for Breitbart News: Of course you're allowed to show civilians caught in the crossfire. You should also mention all the restrictions that Hamas puts on your reporting inside the Gaza Strip. You should also mention all the context with regard to Hamas putting children in harm's way. You should also routinely mention the fact that Hamas' charter calls for the destruction not only of the state of Israel, but for the murder of Jews across the world. Which of course, CNN does not.

CNN anchor: That's silly, Ben. We talk about that all the time. We talk about the charter, the Hamas charter that says they want to obliterate Israel and wipe Israel off the face of the map. You're just not being fair. That's not true.

Ben Shapiro: You mention it occasionally in the midst of vast swaths of imagery about Israel using what you would term excessive force.

Peter Hart: The media outlets don't see the pushback from the other side. They don't see the upside to standing up for their own reporting. So I think in most cases they cave.

Sut Jhally: Look at the pressure that came down on veteran NBC reporter Ayman Mohyeldin when he was covering the 2014 Gaza invasion for NBC. Mohyeldin was playing soccer on a beach with four Palestinian kids just moments before they were killed by an Israeli rocket. And he talked about this on social media, and shared video of the heartbroken reactions of the kids' parents. (Scene of Palestinian parents weeping) And what did NBC do? They responded by pulling Mohyeldin from Gaza.

And of course there's no greater weapon in the attack arsenal than equating critical coverage of Israel's policies with anti-Semitism.

O'Reilly Factor, Fox News Channel:

- **Bill O'Reilly, host:** Any fair-minded person who follows Al Jazeera knows it's anti-American and anti-Semitic. You're a Jewish man, correct?
- **Alan Colmes:** Yes, I am.
- **Bill O'Reilly:** It doesn't come more anti-Semitic than Al Jazeera. They would do violence to you.
- **Alan Colmes:** Who? A journalist at Al Jazeera?
- **Bill O'Reilly:** The people who run that network. They would do violence to you.
- **Alan Colmes:** I hardly think so.

Noam Chomsky: Abba Eban wrote an article in which he explained to American Jews what their task was. Their task is to show that anyone who's a critic of Zionism, by which he means a critic of the policies of the state of Israel, must be either an anti-Semite or a neurotic self-hating Jew. That covers 100% of possible criticism.

The Daily Show (Comedy Central):

- **Jon Stewart:** We'll start tonight in the Middle East, where Israel ...
- **Person 1:** What Israel isn't supposed to defend itself?
- **Person 2:** Oh yeah, if Mexico bombed Texas would we exercise the same right?
- **Person 3:** What other country is held to the same standard as Israel?
- **Person 4:** Self-hating Jew!

M.J. Rosenberg: So it used to be I was always called a self-hating Jew, and everybody like me was called a self-hating Jew. I am now not only a self-hating Jew, but they also call me an anti-Semite. How I, with my four Jewish grandparents, I'm still an anti-Semite. My wife was born in a displaced persons camp in Germany and I'm an anti-Semite.

Yousef Munayyer: They have for a very long time been able to effectively defend the indefensible to the American public through miseducation and misinformation campaigns, through effective talking points, through smearing individuals on the opposite side of things – labeling them all kinds of things, sympathizers with terrorism.

I've done dozens of interviews, which begin from the terrorism departure point. But when given an opportunity to actually speak and present a different perspective, that can dissolve rather quickly.

Hannity, Fox News Channel:

- **Sean Hannity:** Is Hamas a terrorist organization?
- **Yousef Munayyer:** Do I get to actually speak now?
- **Hannity:** You get to answer the question. It's a simple yes or no question.
- **Munayyer:** Sir, you invited me on here...
- **Hannity:** Is Hamas, whose charter calls for the destruction of Israel, is that a terrorist organization? That's a yes or no question.
- **Munayyer:** Thank you for your question.
- **Hannity:** Finally.
- **Munayyer:** It's very telling to me, and it should be telling to your viewers as well, by the way, that the moment you have a Palestinian voice on your program, who begins to explain the legitimate grievances of Palestinians on the ground...
- **Hannity:** Is Hamas a terrorist organization?
- **Munayyer:** Not just Hamas.
- **Hannity:** Answer! Answer the question!
- **Munayyer:** Let me finish!
- **Hannity:** What part of this can't you get through your thick head? Is Hamas a terrorist?
- **Munayyer:** Excuse me?
- **Hannity:** Yes? Or No?!

Munayyer: The only thing that you're going to say is what we want you to say, and if you don't say it, we're not going to let you speak.

Sut Jhally: So you end up with reporting that gives way more priority and weight to the official Israeli perspective than to the Palestinian one. Look at how American media covered Israel's 2014 attack on Gaza. A keyword search of all the major networks showed that over the course of the 51-day assault, Israel's ongoing military siege and blockade of Gaza were barely mentioned compared to the thousands of times Hamas rocket attacks on Israel were mentioned.

CNN Anchor Jake Tapper: Why is Hamas launching missiles into population centers of Israel?

Sut Jhally: The basic propaganda frame is built into the very assumptions journalists bring to the table.

CNN Anchor Jake Tapper: Since Israel pulled out of Gaza in 2005, 8000 rockets have been fired from Gaza into Israel.

Sut Jhally: This is how propaganda works. It works by getting your words in the mouths of other people, especially the mouths of supposedly objective media commentators.

David Gregory, anchor, NBC's Meet The Press (interviewing Palestinian leader): I'm wondering, though, whether you're outraged by the conduct of Hamas, starting the conflict by firing rockets, building tunnels to kill and kidnap Israelis, being more than willing to sacrifice Palestinian lives by embedding them into their own kind of arsenal and using them, as Israel contends, as human shields. Do you have a level of outrage at Hamas itself?

Sut Jhally: It doesn't seem like propaganda at all ... it just seems like news. And this goes across all the major media, including the supposedly most liberal. Look at Rachel Maddow on MSNBC, who's known as the leading progressive voice on mainstream television. She did only four segments on the war. And during these few segments she never once mentioned Israel's ongoing occupation of the West Bank or its siege and blockade of Gaza, and never once mentioned the fact that the US has armed Israel with the very weapons that were being used against a defenseless civilian population. Instead choosing to frame the invasion as part of a senseless cycle of violence perpetrated by both sides.

Rachel Maddow: It's been a constant cycle of fighting between Israel and Hamas for the past several years in Gaza. And the fighting and the cause of the fighting feel terribly familiar because this is basically a recurring war. And if it feels like deja vu, if it feels, ugh, I've heard all of this before, you are right because this really does keep happening, over and over again.

Rula Jebreal: Rachel Maddow, the most important woman on MSNBC, the leader when it comes to politics. In six weeks of war, never mentioned the word blockade, occupation,

illegal settlements. Never mentioned the support that Congress have for Israel, unconditional amount of money, billions of dollars. What is that? What a disappointment!

Our media operations – national media – is a scandal when it comes to Israel. I look at the UK, with all its deficit, and there's real debate. For example, there's this anchor, called John Snow, Channel 4 in the UK, and he interviewed Mark Regev and he grilled him with questions. Grilled him.

Jon Snow, Channel 4 News, U.K. interviewing Mark Regev:

- **Jon Snow:** Mark Regev, how does killing children on a beach contribute to that purpose? What was the point of bombing the El Wafa hospital, for goodness sake? There are grave uncertainties about whether you are acting within the law.
- **Mark Regev:** I disagree.
- **Snow:** Oh yes. Oh yes. You are deliberately targeting neighborhoods in which you know there are women and children. You've tried everything with Gaza. You've besieged it for seven years. The people live an intolerable and ghastly life and you know that better than anybody. Why don't you try one other thing? Talking? Why not talk? Why not be brave and talk directly with them? Why not?

Rula Jebreal: I can never see this in America. I've never seen anything like this in the United States.

Sut Jhally: There have been occasional examples of American journalists who've had the courage to challenge the official Israeli line. Back in the 50s, CBS's Mike Wallace didn't back down from grilling Israeli Ambassador Abba Eban about Israel's illegal takeover of Arab land.

Mike Wallace, CBS, 60 Minutes: The fact remains that Israel benefitted territorially from a war, from armed violence. As a member of the Judaic faith, which cherishes social justice and morality, do you believe that any country should profit territorially from violence?

Sut Jhally: And years later, Wallace didn't shy away from comparing the terrorist tactics of Palestinian militants with the terrorist tactics of Jewish militants in the 1940s.

Mike Wallace, CBS, 60 Minutes: The fact is that innocent people die from terror, whoever the terrorists. The Jewish independence fighters, trying to hasten the exit of the British from Palestine and to intimidate the Arab population there, bombed bus stops and office buildings, railroad trains and shopping crowds. The fighters of Stern and Irgun took a toll of innocent victims that ran into the hundreds.

Sut Jhally: More recently, in 2012, during a 60 Minutes piece, the late Bob Simon dared to report on what day-to-day life is like for Palestinian Christians who live under Israeli occupation.

Bob Simon (CBS, 60 Minutes): Israel has occupied the West Bank for 45 years, turning the little town where Christ was born into what its residents call an open-air prison. Kristy

Anastis lives with her mother Clair, her father, brother, and sister, in this house, which is surrounded on three sides by the wall.

Bob Simon (to woman on the street): How do you live with this?

Sut Jhally: Simon's report was seen as so unusual, and so incendiary, that Israeli Ambassador Michael Oren actually tried to spike it – censor it – leading Simon to directly confront him on camera.

60 Minutes:

- **Michael Oren:** When I heard that you were going to do a story about Christians in the Holy Land, and my assumption – and had I believe – information about the nature of it, and it's been confirmed by this interview today...
- **Bob Simon:** Nothing has been confirmed by the interview, Mr. Ambassador! Because you don't know what's going to be put on air.
- **Oren:** Okay, I don't. True.
- **Simon:** Mr. Ambassador, I've been doing this a long time, and I've received lots of reactions from just about everyone I've done stories about. But I've never gotten a reaction before from a story that hasn't been broadcast yet.
- **Oren:** Well ... there's a first time for everything, Bob.

Sut Jhally: These are examples of exceptional reporting, but they are the exception. And there's a reason for that. In each of these cases, these journalists were mercilessly attacked and labeled anti-Semitic. It didn't matter that they were both Jewish. That's how the climate of intimidation works.

Rashid Khalidi: It's almost impossible to get any view that isn't one way or another shaped by an Israeli perspective, almost impossible. It cannot get in without facing a firestorm of pit-bull attacks to make sure that the line is followed.

Max Blumenthal: Everyone who's trying to tell the American public a different side of the story, an alternative view of the conflict that's reality-based, has already crossed a barrier of fear, and I think they've already told themselves, well, I'm going to pay for this, but I'm ready to pay the price.

Changing Perceptions

Narrator: Over just the past few years, the proliferation of social media and Internet news sources has made it increasingly difficult for the Israeli government and pro-Israel groups in the US to manage American perceptions of the conflict. Video footage and reporting from the ground bearing witness to the reality of the occupation are now more accessible than ever on the Internet.

In addition, over the past few years a number of high-profile documentaries – made by Israeli and Palestinian filmmakers alike – have trained a harsh light on current Israeli policy and the repression of Palestinian rights.

Scene from *5 Broken Cameras*:

Palestinian man, challenging Israeli soldiers (translated, English subtitles): This is a small village. What do you think? Have you no heart? No family? Every one of you knows that this is village land! You stole my land!

Narrator: At the same time, a powerful new boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement has been gaining momentum and raising awareness of the occupation ... while activists from the Black Lives Matter movement have been making explicit connections between police violence against African Americans and the Israeli military's repression of Palestinians.

Marc Lamont Hill, journalist and activist, in Nazareth: We stand next to people who continue to courageously struggle and resist the occupation, people who continue to dream and fight for freedom. From Ferguson to Palestine, the struggle for freedom continues.

Narrator: And all of these developments seem to be having an effect. Polls now show that while sympathy for Israel remains at all-time highs among older Americans, it has been hemorrhaging among young people.

Sut Jhally: Despite the efforts of the lobby, something really striking is taking place. Lots of young people are abandoning the mainstream media and turning instead to other independent sources. So they have a totally different way of making sense of what's happening – an unfiltered view of Israel's repression. And pro-Israel operatives like Frank Luntz are in a panic. In his latest report, he calls what's happening with young people a "disaster," and demands that Israel's supporters respond.

And people have answered the call. You have powerful right-wing billionaires like Sheldon Adelson, a major donor to Republican candidates, bankrolling a campaign to silence and intimidate student-activists on college campuses. But it's not working. Groups like Students for Justice in Palestine, who see what's happening to Palestinians as a civil rights issue, have refused to be intimidated – they're refusing to back down even though they're being labeled as anti-Semitic and terrorist sympathizers – and their numbers are growing.

Yousef Munayyer: As the discourse begins to open, more people are starting to understand this as a rights-based issue. Not an issue of radicalism. This is a movement for the rights of people who's rights are being denied – who are living under occupation; who want to live in their country, freely, just like anybody else.

Rashid Khalidi: You can see just so many video clips of kids having their hands smashed by soldiers with batons. You can see just so many pictures of thousands of people being

killed as happened in Gaza. And at a certain point there's a cognitive dissonance. You realize that what you're being told is a pack of lies.

Mark Crispin Miller: Let's just get away from mythologies and talk about the reality. And then maybe be able to persuade people that they should not any longer give their unwavering support to a nation that is engaged in a policy that's not just inhumane and brutal but ultimately suicidal.

Stephen Walt: Given the central role that the United States plays in backing Israel, it seems to me Americans, all Americans, have a right to question particular Israeli policies, and in particular the prolonged occupation – the fact that the Palestinian people have been kept without a state and without any political rights for decades now.

Phyllis Bennis: For us in the United States, I think, the issue has to be what is our government doing? How is our government allowing, enabling, supporting, arming, defending Israeli violations?

Sut Jhally: In the end, this comes down to a battle for the minds of the American people. A battle over the stories they're told to make sense of this conflict. A battle over perception. The more Americans are able to see the reality of occupation with their own eyes ... to see images of routine daily violence, of the repression and humiliation that never make their way into mainstream news ... the more they'll question the image of Israel as this tiny little David up against a bullying Arab Goliath ... and start to wonder if it's actually the outgunned Palestinians who might be the real Davids here. When that starts becoming the dominant perception here in the US, all bets are off. It all comes down to American public perception.

Noam Chomsky: That's the one way to change anything. Changing perception and understanding here leading to a change of policy here. As long as the United States supports Israel nothing is going to happen. US government will support it as long as the US population tolerates it.

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